



Kimberly A. Foster  
Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON, VICE CHAIR

## APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **October 15, 2007**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Not Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Ann Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Adelina Sorkin  
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Sandra Rudnick  
Stacey Savelle  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Sorkin announced the New Beginnings conference, which will take place at the Los Angeles Convention Center on October 25.
- The Community Coalition's gala dinner on October 25 will honor Commissioner Murray, and invitations have been sent to all Commissioners.
- On November 20, the Board of Supervisors will recognize individuals and groups from the faith-based community, including the staff of the Department of Children and Family Services' Torrance office.

- At a recent meeting of the Board's children's deputies, Lisa Parrish updated attendees on the group home and foster family agency scorecard now being developed, and also reported on enforcement efforts for the new law requiring school districts to enroll foster children within three days.
- Also at the children's deputy meeting, representatives from the California Youth Connection, a coalition of former foster youth, announced that organization's annual conference on June 26 through 28, 2008, and noted the need for event funding support. California Youth Connection representatives also approached Board deputies about obtaining a formal seat on the Commission for Children and Families, and Chair Sorkin suggested that Commissioners discuss that request at their November retreat.
- Children's deputies also discussed the issue regarding co-location at DCFS Kinship offices of attorneys from the Alliance for Children's Rights. Legal assistance for caregivers and guardians is a much-needed service and will continue to be available; however, due to a variety of reasons, co-location has been taken off the table at this time, as confirmed by Nick P., Child Deputy of Don Knabe. DCFS director Trish Ploehn will meet with Alliance representatives next week to begin working on the proposal.
- Chair Sorkin passed along Commissioner Rudnick's request that Commissioners contact Board offices to urge a reaffirmed support for the pending prevention initiative, developed and refined over the last three-plus years by a Prevention work group.

The overall prevention initiative is known as HST (Healthier Communities, Stronger Families, Thriving Children), and consists of two concurrent components:

- ✓ A one-year DCFS demonstration project funded by \$5 million set aside from last year's family preservation budget
- ✓ A more expansive six-year, \$8.3 million countywide initiative spearheaded by the Chief Executive Office working with other county departments and community partners (developed in response to a Board directive to expand the responsibility for primary prevention of child abuse and neglect beyond a single county agency)

Board letters for both components were originally planned in October, Ms. Ploehn reported, but questions arose as to how any promising practices brought to light by the DCFS component would be sustained, and planners determined that dovetailing the two efforts and strengthening their ability to work together would make sense. As a result, representatives from DCFS, the CEO, and Board offices are refining the two Board letters into a single summary with attachments, which should go before the supervisors in November.

- As approved by the Commission last month, County Counsel has requested that the Juvenile Court amend the 2002 Blanket Order allowing certain Commissioners and Commission staff, as stated in the Order, to review DCFS cases in which children

have died or suffered serious injuries, including sexual abuse as described in Penal Code section 111651.1, or has been exposed to extreme risk of harm. The request Order would expand that access to Probation cases if a child with a DCFS case has died and has had a history with the Probation Department. A copy of County Counsel's October 2, 2007, letter and Proposed Blanket Order was included in Commission packets. The proposal has been sent to the affected departments and other interested parties by the Court for comment (comments or objections are due by October 30, 2007). The Court will take any of those comments and objections into account to make its ruling.

County Counsel's Katie Fesler clarified the language of the current Blanket Order, which refers not only to official court cases but to DCFS contacts, which can include unsubstantiated referrals, a family's participation in voluntary programs, and so on. As far as Ms. Fesler knows, under the current 2002 blanket order, no one (the Court, County Counsel, or DCFS) has interpreted the order to limit access to actual court cases. She anticipates that a child's history with the Probation Department, whether formal or informal, would be treated in a similar fashion, and that case notes would be made available. Per Andrea Gordon, although formal and informal probation cases are handled differently under the law, they are all assigned a tracking number; and she does not foresee problems in that regard. However, Ms. Gordon indicated that by law, records are *not* kept on youth receiving family delinquency prevention services under Section 236 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, who have not been arrested; even Probation staff are not allowed to view records on those children, and their information does not come up on a name-and-birthdate search of the computer system.

- Commissioner Biondi announced the governor's signature of SB 39, legislation sponsored by Senator Carole Migden that mandates the public disclosure of information on children who have died as a result of abuse or neglect, to help assure children's safety through public scrutiny. The bill creates a new section—10840.4—of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and Commissioner Worthy-Clayton recommended that all Commissioners review the bill in detail.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

DCFS director Trish Ploehn updated Commissioners on a number of topics.

- Marilynn Garrison, a DCFS employee for the past 18 years, has been appointed chief of the out-of-home care management division. Ms. Garrison briefly reviewed her history with the department, from line worker to child abduction specialist to dependency investigation supervisor, and expressed appreciation to the various Commissioners she has worked with during her career. She looks forward to furthering departmental goals and Title IV-E waiver goals in her new position, and to working with community partners.

- Jonathan Byers has replaced Paul Buehler as head of the risk management division, which encompasses the health and safety, internal affairs, litigation, and child fatality/critical incident sections. Mr. Byers has served as a case-carrying social worker in Santa Fe Springs and a serious incident analyst at DCFS headquarters, and spent the last two and a half years in the Belvedere office. He looks forward to working with Commissioners on reforms already underway in his division.
- Interviews for the senior deputy director position are still being held, and Chair Sorkin will participate on the interview panel.
- Union negotiations focusing on caseloads and workloads are in progress, with four full-day meetings planned, two of which have already taken place.
- A new policy was instituted last month that expands the role of DCFS public health nurses, requiring them to accompany emergency response social workers not only on cases involving severe neglect, as per previous policy, but also on cases involving general neglect, whenever a medical issue is identified.
- In the county's supplemental budget, the Department of Public Health had been on the brink of losing funding for its 20 public health nurses who serve DCFS children on the back end of the system. With the advocacy of DCFS, the Board of Supervisors agreed to provide the additional funding to retain these positions.
- A 60-day pilot in the Compton office will experiment with assigning six public health nurses to DCFS units to work alongside regular nurses, interchangeably serving the full gamut of system youth. If the effort is successful, Ms. Ploehn hopes to expand it.
- Funds received from the first supervisorial district will establish a medical hub at the former MacLaren Children's Center facility within the next eight to twelve months. It will be an offshoot of the Violence Intervention Program (VIP) at the LAC+USC hub and will initially be open two to three days a week, nights, and weekends. Supervisor Molina's office will contribute \$500,000 for capital improvements in the former MacLaren infirmary area, augmented by \$150,000 in construction and refurbishing funds from the county's Community Development Commission.

This area of the San Gabriel Valley is the only part of the county now without convenient hub access, and the 10 to 20 percent of detained children who are not being seen at a hub almost invariably come from this region. Once the facility is up and running, Ms. Ploehn will mandate that every child detained by the department be assessed at a medical hub.

- Discussions are in progress with the juvenile court about joint initiatives for 2008, with a focus, now that safety and permanency are being addressed, on child well-being. In February, the court will observe Dental Health Month, handing out literature, toothbrushes, and other related supplies to children. Celebration events for reunified families—similar to annual adoption events—are also being considered as a way

to spread the word about the services DCFS can provide. Commissioners see these proposed events also as a means to follow up on reunified families, and as a venue in which families might connect with each other for support. Planners are considering a picnic in the park during the spring or early summer, and Commissioners recommended involving faith-based organizations and approaching companies such as Costco or Target to provide financial support and incentives for participants.

### **CHILD FATALITIES IN RELATION TO GANG SHOOTINGS: A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE**

Prior to introducing former Pasadena school board member Prentice Deadrick, Chair Sorkin distributed a map of Los Angeles County deaths to children involving a firearm in 2004, the most recent data available from the California Department of Health Services.

Mr. Deadrick reviewed his background, including his first experience of having a gun pointed at him—by a National Guardsman—as his family tried to return to their home during the Watts riots. He was attending college in San Diego when gangs began to take hold in the Los Angeles area, and settled in Pasadena to do crisis intervention work following graduate school at UCLA. Although Pasadena has the reputation of being a rich, white enclave, about 57 percent of its increasingly multicultural population lives in 2.3 square miles at the northwest corner of the city, where, it is said, Pasadena houses its poor. Mr. Deadrick was serving as the city's northwest manager in 1993, when the infamous Halloween shootings took place, and he described the incident and its aftermath.

A young gang member had recently been killed by a rival gang over a romantic relationship, and his peers were cruising that night in search of their adversaries. Eight young people from outside the northwest area had come to that neighborhood to trick-or-treat, costumed as gang members. Mistaking them for their rivals, the gang members opened fire, and three young people, ages 13 and 14, were killed. Mr. Deadrick knew them all—the dead children, the five traumatized survivors, the three young men prosecuted and now on death row, and all the young people's parents. More than 11 gang-related homicides had been reported in Pasadena that year, but community response swelled around these innocent victims—young people doing well in school and keeping out of gang life.

George Regas, then rector of the activist All Saints Church, formed the Coalition Against Violence, which involved prominent individuals in bringing teenagers and community members together. The Western Justice Center provided conflict training, new community policing tactics (and a new police chief) were put into place, a leading prosecutor obtained gang injunctions, and from 1999 through 2006, no gang-related homicides occurred in Pasadena. Last year, sadly, that record was broken when another innocent, a girl standing in front of a club, was gunned down.

Over the years, as northwest Pasadena has gentrified and Olde Towne Pasadena's development has begun to make living in the area too expensive for gang-bangers, gang activity has increased in outlying areas—Azusa, Glendora, Rialto, Rancho Cucamonga, and the Moreno Valley. The symptoms may have been dealt with in some neighborhoods, but the underlying causes for gang violence have clearly not decreased. The gang phenome-

non has little to do with ethnic or cultural background; gang activity can be prevalent in African-American, Latino, Armenian, Asian, and white communities alike.

In Mr. Deadrick's educational experience, children who don't attend preschool tend to start kindergarten behind their peers who do, but gains often evaporate by the third grade. Gang members tend to have been relegated to special education classes by the second or third grade, even if they had no behavior problems, and planners track the fifth-grade test scores of African-American and Latino boys to project the number of future prison beds needed. Teachers in the third and fourth grades use bell curves to slot their students into their own expectations of low achievement, even in gifted and talented programs. A lack of math skills—normally taught in second through fourth grade—prevents youngsters from obtaining positions in various industries, and the subsequent lack of labor skills keeps them unemployed and open to gang activity and violence. Indoctrinating youth on living healthy lives should begin as early as first and second grade, and the association of recalcitrance with disability must be broken, so that acting-out youth are no longer automatically removed from class. As many as one-third of African-American males in the Pasadena school system are placed in special education classes, a direct result, Mr. Deadrick believes, of the poor training teachers receive in graduate schools of education.

Mr. Deadrick thanked Commissioners for making the community perspective part of their mindset, and encouraged discussions that will help government bureaucracy truly make an impact on deterring gangs.

### **TRAUMA LEAVES CHILDREN BEHIND: A SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE**

Dr. Marleen Wong and Pia Escudero, LCSW, explained the role of the Los Angeles Unified School District's crisis counseling and intervention services division, which is one of 48 sites nationwide dealing with psychological trauma at school and how gang violence affects education.

Trauma affecting children is embedded in the fabric of daily life, and can include child abuse and maltreatment, domestic and community violence, criminal victimization, medical trauma, traumatic loss, and accidents and fires. Traumatic events can range from school-related violence, bullying (the most common type of violent behavior), and gang violence and threats, to Internet stalking and victimization, terrorist attacks, and natural and technological disasters. Over 600 incidents of school shootings have occurred nationwide, and the U.S. Department of Education has developed an initiative to prepare schools for all sorts of hazards. Should an earthquake occur during the school day in Los Angeles, for example, schools must be prepared to care for students and staff—in the case of LAUSD, over 720,000 students from kindergarten through grade 12, and 90,000 staff, about half of whom are teachers.

In a national survey of almost 1,250 adolescents done in 1995, only 27 percent had no history of community violence either as a witness or a victim. By 2004, however, a survey of nearly 29,000 LAUSD sixth-graders in 20 different middle schools in east and south Los Angeles found that only 6 percent had experienced no violence in the past year. A smaller sample found that 27 percent of 770 sixth-graders had symptoms of post-trau-

matic stress disorder in the clinical range—a higher rate than that of Iraq war veterans—and 16 percent had symptoms of depression in the clinical range.

Even a single exposure to a traumatic event may cause jumpiness, intrusive thoughts or flashbacks, interrupted sleep and nightmares, anger and moodiness, social withdrawal, and loss of concentration and memory. Chronic exposure to traumatic events, especially during a child's early years, can result in brain changes that:

- Affect attention, memory, and cognition
- Reduce a child's ability to focus, organize, and process information
- Interfere with effective problem-solving and planning
- Result in the potential for overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety

Adolescent boys in particular act out, engaging in risky behaviors and becoming assaultive themselves, being suspended or expelled from school with alarming frequency. The negative effects of trauma exposure may explain one aspect of the bleak reality that even after generations of education 'reform,' African-American and Latino students continue to trail far behind their white peers and drop out of high school more frequently.

LAUSD's crisis counseling and intervention services division provides training and consultation for school-based and district-wide teams of volunteers who respond to traumatic incidents on school campuses every day. Ms. Escudero offered a student-made DVD on students and trauma to Commissioners to view at their November retreat.

### **INJURY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY: A PUBLIC HEALTH PERSPECTIVE**

The Department of Public Health's Nicolle Perras reviewed Los Angeles County's injury and violence prevention program (<http://www.lapublichealth.org/IVPP>), whose mission is to reduce and prevent injuries, monitor their occurrence among resident population groups, and develop and implement strategies to reduce their impact.

Of the total 2004 county population of about 10 million, more than one-third (37 percent) were under the age of 24, and injuries were the leading cause of death for residents age 1 to 44 (4,134 out of 59,153 total deaths, or about 7 percent). People who die from injuries are younger than those who die from other causes (42 years versus 72.9 years), and rates of injury death are highest among 20- to 24-year-olds for homicides, and age 65 and older for suicides and unintentional deaths.

From 1995 through 2004, unintentional injury deaths were most commonly related to motor vehicles, closely followed by firearm homicides. Homicide shows up as a leading cause of death in almost every age group, and suicide is also prevalent in older teens and young adults. From 1997 through 2006, hospitalizations dropped for non-fatal abuse and neglect of children birth to age ten; the perpetrators of those injuries were often the child's father or mother.

Death data from 1999 through 2004 breaks down by racial/ethnic group as follows:

	<u>Unintentional Injury</u>	<u>Suicide</u>	<u>Homicide</u>
White	43%	58%	11%
Black	13%	8%	34%
Latino	35%	23%	50%
Asian/Other	9%	11%	5%

Of all injury deaths countywide in that time, whites and Latinos each accounted for about a third, and blacks were disproportionately represented compared to their presence in the population. Overall, three-quarters of all injury deaths involve male victims, with firearm homicide being the leading cause of death for black and Latino males. Unintentional injury and suicide rates are highest in SPA 1, and homicide rates are highest in SPA 6.

Of the 2,084 violent deaths reported by the coroner's office in 2006, 1,070 were homicides, 689 suicides, 277 undetermined, and 10 unintentional firearm deaths. A pilot program was begun by the Centers for Disease Control in 2002 to ensure more timely reporting of violent deaths, and is now active in 17 states.

#### **A CALL TO ACTION: A CASE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION TO L.A.'S GANG VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC**

Susan Lee, program director at the Advancement Project, reviewed that organization's report on gang violence presented to the city of Los Angeles in January of this year, and the multiple initiatives that have resulted. A May motion by Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke requested that the county's Chief Executive Office review the report, along with the sheriff's plan and the Los Angeles city mayor's proposal, and the first meeting of the resulting work group took place in July. From that group, a steering committee has been formed consisting of the Chief Executive Officer, Sheriff Baca, Los Angeles police chief Bill Bratton, representatives from Mayor Villaraigosa's office, Los Angeles Unified Schools chief David Brewer, Los Angeles County superintendent of schools Darline Robles, and Advancement Project co-director Connie Rice. The steering committee, which met for the first time several weeks ago, is putting together a Board letter to be submitted in December, with a plan to be put into place next year.

The Advancement Project's report, the third to be commissioned by the city on the subject in the past 30 years, looked at gang violence from a public health perspective, not from a suppression or law enforcement stance. As the report phrases it, "Los Angeles is to violence what Bangladesh is to diarrhea, which means that the crisis is at a dire level requiring a massive response." Gang-related crimes are most prevalent in south and east Los Angeles, San Pedro, and the harbor area, and 2006 data saw a 43 percent increase in the San Fernando Valley and a 150 percent increase in the police department's Mission division. The number of gang members within the county as a whole may be as many as twice those within the city limits, but only a small percentage are committing violent crimes, yet 57 percent of the city's homicides last year were gang-related. Getting countywide data is not easy, Ms. Lee said, and the Advancement Project is working on standardizing and using data collectively across county and city departments.



Communities with the highest concentrations of parolees and probationers, along with the highest levels of disadvantage—measured by levels of unemployment, poverty, household income, and educational attainment—were extremely vulnerable to recidivism. Pockets of these communities exist in many areas of the city, but especially in SPA 6, which, along with SPA 2, is also home to high concentrations of children under age 18. As reported earlier in today's meeting by Dr. Wong, high rates of post-traumatic stress syndrome and depression exist within the child population, and a study done in 2001–2002 found that 90 percent of the 4,000 surveyed students living in high-crime areas reported being exposed to violence either as a victim or a witness.

Of the city's 40,000 gang members (and an estimated 80,000 in the county), only 5 to 7 percent are responsible for the long-term epidemic of gang homicide and violence discussed in the Advancement Project's report. (Between 1981 and 2001, 10,000 young gang homicides took place in California, almost 75 percent of which occurred in Los Angeles.) However, after 25 years of a multi-billion dollar war on gangs and at least 450,000 youth being arrested in the last decade, Los Angeles has six times as many gangs and twice as many gang members as it did before. Clearly, suppression and containment efforts alone are not enough.

Many barriers exist to saving Los Angeles children from gangs and violence. Although 93,000 youth are out of school and jobless, fewer than 9,000 are served by the city's gang prevention and intervention program, L.A. Bridges, and fewer than 1,500 of those are gang members; only 61 gang intervention workers are employed by the Bridges programs. In terms of employment, the one factor studies have shown that positively affects gang violence, only 3,000 summer jobs were available for youth in 2005, compared with New York City's 40,000 jobs. Countywide, spending for gang suppression efforts, at more than \$72.2 million, is more than three times the amount spent on prevention (less than \$22 million) and nearly seven times that spent on intervention (less than \$11.5 million)—despite the fact that a single dollar spent on prevention has been proved to save seven dollars down the line. In addition, existing city and county structures, which spend \$958 million annually on programs for youth in need—are inadequately coordinated and lack accountability. Commissioner Biondi commented on the report's county data source, which does not include \$67 million in general funds for the Probation Department and another \$15 million spent on probation camps. Funds coming into the county for prevention, she said, are regularly being redesignated for suppression efforts.

The report proposes a multi-pronged, child-and-family-centered approach involving schools, business and philanthropy, faith-based institutions, parks, community organizations, and a community task force, all underpinned by city and county government, law enforcement, and a research, evaluation, and policy institute. School campuses would be open for extended hours, community violence prevention centers and other weekend and after-school facilities would be established, and park programs and activities would run until midnight on school nights and 2:00 a.m. on weekends. This approach was tried in Baldwin Village in 2003 for nine weeks one summer, and brought about a 17 percent decrease in violent crime and a complete cessation for the year of youth homicides.

The ‘must-haves’ of any successful gang reduction approach include:

- A regional strategy
  - ✓ A unanimous and strong mission to end gang violence
  - ✓ Comprehensive neighborhood approaches
  - ✓ A public health and family health approach
  - ✓ Plans that are expert- and data-driven, not politically driven
  - ✓ Neighborhood-specific plans designed with local leaders and experts
  - ✓ Documented and sustained reductions in violence at the neighborhood level
- A comprehensive synergy among prevention, suppression, and intervention/re-entry components
- Leadership with sufficient political clout and power, independence, and trust from all key communities
  - ✓ A sustainable infrastructure for implementation
  - ✓ A clear mission and mandate
  - ✓ Adequate resources and qualified staff
- A countywide effort to secure new and robust funding for violence prevention
- A regional coordinating entity

The steering committee from the work group formed by Supervisor Burke’s motion has agreed to identify staff, share information and data, create an infrastructure for coordination, and identify potential demonstration sites, including the county’s HST sites and the city’s gang reduction zones. Ms. Lee sees the effort as a great opportunity for city and county collaboration on neighborhood-based strategies, and for involving faith-based, business, and civic leadership in community investment. The Chamber of Commerce has been a key supporter of this comprehensive approach, and has in fact made gang violence one of its five actions areas for this fiscal year.

Commissioner Biondi asked that the Commission office be put on the list to receive notices of meetings of the work group and the steering committee, which are being sent out by the office of deputy chief executive officer Doyle Campbell. Vice Chair Worthy-Clayton proposed that the Commission think about focusing on violence affecting children and on developing a systematic approach for becoming involved and making recommendations. She thanked Chair Sorkin for scheduling today’s presentations and asked that the Commission consider continuing this educational series.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Kathy Roth**, a foster mother for twelve years and a legal guardian for a year and a half, asked the Commission’s help in requesting that DCFS revisit its policy of allowing social workers to visit foster children at school and sending teachers and counselors correspondence (such as evaluation forms) about foster children. Ms. **Roth** cited instances in which the status of foster children under her care was revealed to peers, and their academic work needlessly disrupted, through these practices. State law requires that foster children

receive treatment equal to that of adoptees, she said, and she urged DCFS to mandate that its workers respect the privacy of foster children.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**